

# CHAPTER 14: URBAN DESIGN

By determining the physical form and organization of a city, urban design visually represents the heritage, identity, and character of the city's inhabitants. Effective urban design practices help to create special places and attractive neighborhoods that are worthy of civic pride and efficient in municipal function. Urban design strategies and techniques often focus on improving the public realm - the spaces within a city that are not private property. Although these spaces are not privately owned, the private structures and landscapes that form their edges often define them. The City's development regulations help to shape these privately owned edges. The public realm includes a wide variety of spaces that Fort Worth residents encounter constantly throughout the city, perhaps without notice or recognition that these spaces are the products of professional designers. These designers may be architects, planners, civil engineers, or landscape architects, but all help shape the experience of Fort Worth's physical environment.

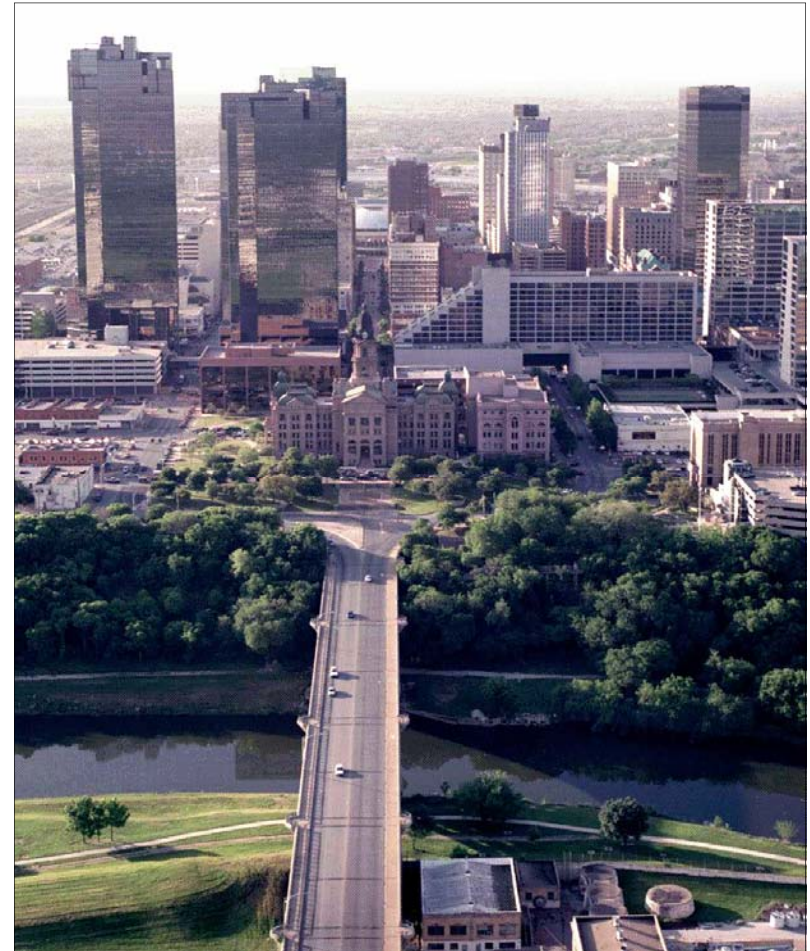
A fundamental premise of this urban design chapter is that there is a mutual relationship between quality of life and a city's built environment. Urban form influences social and economic opportunity and contributes to civic identity. After a discussion of general community aspirations and trends, this chapter focuses on several components of Fort Worth's built environment: streets and streetscapes, public buildings, public spaces, trees, the Trinity River and waterfront spaces, gateways and scenic corridors. The chapter also describes the characteristic urban design elements of mixed-use growth centers and urban villages. Finally, policies and programs are prescribed to further enhance Fort Worth's quality of life.

## EXISTING CONDITIONS AND TRENDS

Fort Worth citizens have repeatedly stated their desire to reinforce the city's small town atmosphere and friendly character in planning for our future. In public planning meetings, citizens requested well-defined, mixed-use, walkable, and safe neighborhoods with tree-lined streets, gathering places for social interaction, and neighborhood parks. They also emphasized the importance of improving the Trinity River corridor, beautifying transportation corridors, improving signage, and preserving valuable views, vistas, historic resources, and neighborhood character. Fort Worth citizens also support the concept of growth centers, which will increase interaction among people and reinforce residents' sense of community.

Similar to most American cities, the urban form of Fort Worth has changed as growth has expanded outward. Narrow streets, wide sidewalks, and buildings built to the property line once defined Fort Worth. Downtown Fort Worth maintains this pedestrian-scaled, urban character, and remnants of similar urban design can be seen in older areas such as the 1400 block of North Main and the Historic Handley section of East Lancaster, as well as in recent redevelopment projects in the Medical District. In contrast to this traditional urbanism, the majority of the city has adopted a suburban form, where the scale and layout of new development is oriented to the automobile, with parking lots between sidewalks and storefronts, and single use

**Downtown Fort Worth**



This photograph illustrates the physical relationships among buildings, streets, sidewalks, and open space in Downtown Fort Worth. (Source: City of Fort Worth, 1999.)

districts that isolate residential, commercial, and industrial uses. One urban design goal is to return to a more pedestrian-oriented development pattern.

### **Streets and Streetscapes**

The width of a roadway contributes significantly to the experience of walking or driving along that street. Many streets in Fort Worth have expanded to accommodate more vehicular traffic, and have become less appealing to pedestrians in the process. Along these streets, building fronts whose walls once defined the walking space are now placed far away from the sidewalk and right of way; narrow sidewalks are placed at the edge of the roadway without any buffer; and street crossings are often dangerous and unmarked.

There are urban design strategies to create a physical environment that comforts pedestrians while successfully accommodating existing and projected traffic volumes. For example, building facades should be built close to the street to give pedestrians the sense of being in an outdoor room. On-street parking can provide a comforting buffer between pedestrians and car traffic while reducing the need for surface parking lots. Finally, amenities along sidewalks, such as street lamps, landscaping, and benches, can be added to sidewalks to enhance the streetscape. These fixtures and amenities are important elements of the overall character of a city and are within the immediate view of pedestrians and vehicle passengers.

The absence or poor condition of sidewalks in both older and new districts makes many areas of Fort Worth unfriendly to pedestrians. The provision of sidewalks on all streets, as well as the addition of streetscape amenities, enhances the pedestrian experience, promotes walking, and improves the image of our city. The City approved a new sidewalk policy in July 2000, which requires the installation of sidewalks on all publicly maintained streets except local industrial streets within an industrial park. In newly developing areas, the location and design of sidewalks is determined during the subdivision process. When redevelopment occurs, sidewalks must be installed when improvements are made that exceed 50 percent of the assessed value of the existing building.

Like sidewalks, trees are an important element of the public realm. There are many reasons for conserving and planting trees within urban areas. Communities often plant trees for beautification or to maintain greenery in urban environments. Additionally, communities are recognizing the environmental and public health benefits of trees, as well as the economic benefits of tree-lined streets and parks. Effective planning and management should include the use of native and drought resistant vegetation, which will thrive in the local climate.

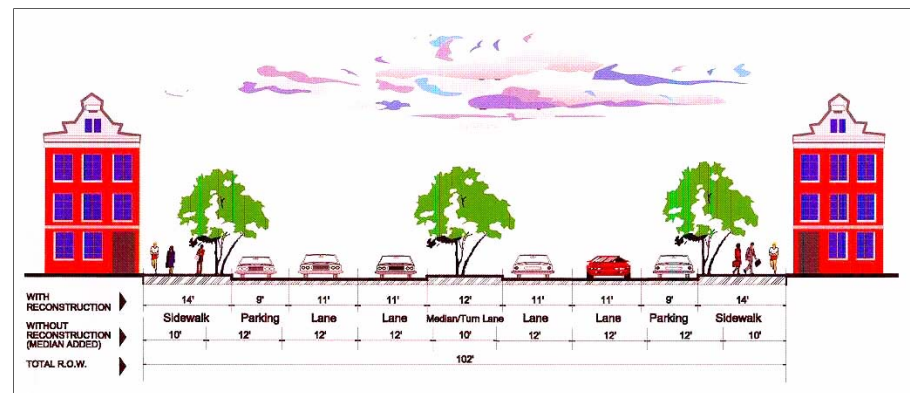
Strategically placed street trees perform several functions. They provide shade from sunlight and produce variations in lighting that transform the sidewalk environment as the day progresses. Similar to on-street parking, trees provide a buffer that separates the pedestrian realm from the roadway. Trees planted along sidewalks in parkways and those located within roadway medians also enhance the experience of car passengers by adding rhythm and beauty to the local scenery. It has also been

## **Streetscapes in Downtown Fort Worth**



Downtown Fort Worth, Inc. and others have created a pedestrian-scaled environment on Main Street. Street lamps and trees line the brick sidewalks. (Source: Planning Department, 1999.)

## **Attractive Streetscapes**



This cross-section of an urban street includes wide sidewalks, on-street parking, and street trees. The building facades act as walls that frame the pedestrian space. (Source: The Goodman Corporation, 2000.)



found that closely-spaced trees along a street can slow traffic. All the trees in the city constitute a 24 percent canopy cover, but Fort Worth lacks sufficient trees along its roadways. A 1995 inventory concluded that there are about 85,000 street trees planted in street parkways, representing only a 13 percent canopy cover along the streets.

Arcades and canopies perform many of the same functions as street trees, extending from building facades to improve the environment for those walking and driving. Pedestrian-scaled street lamps and signs add variety and safety to the sidewalk environment. Street furniture such as benches, trash receptacles, and water fountains can also contribute to an attractive streetscape that welcomes pedestrians. Finally, special pavement treatments for sidewalks – brick, granite, or even tiled mosaics – can dignify a streetscape once thought of as purely functional. Many streets in Fort Worth lack streetscape fixtures and are visually cluttered by the unplanned, disorganized arrangements of signs, utility poles, and street furniture. Visual clutter makes a streetscape unattractive, and often unsafe. Greater awareness of urban design strategies will help transform our streets and sidewalks.

### **Public Buildings**

The location and design of public buildings often affect perceptions about the significance of our public institutions. Virtually all of Fort Worth's older neighborhoods possess a historic school building. These buildings are among the most prized architectural resources within the city. Other significant public buildings include courthouses, municipal office buildings, transportation facilities, convention centers, public auditoriums, fire and police stations, and county jails. These public structures reflect the character of Fort Worth more than any other category of buildings. Because of their symbolic and functional significance, public buildings are a principal component of urban design plans. New public buildings, such as schools, should be strategically located to strengthen our neighborhoods and mixed-use growth centers. They should also reflect today's highest design standards. Public participation in the planning and design of all public structures is critical to the location and construction of public buildings that reflect the tastes and aspirations of the citizens of Fort Worth.

### **Public Spaces**

The influence of pedestrian environments and public spaces is far greater than simple aesthetic appeal. Eating at an outdoor table, browsing the windows of a bustling shopping street, and passing time watching crowds walk by are more than just pleasant diversions, they are components of urban social life that attract residents, businesses, and visitors. The thoughtful design of public spaces can provide these experiences in vibrant areas throughout Fort Worth.

A public space should be:

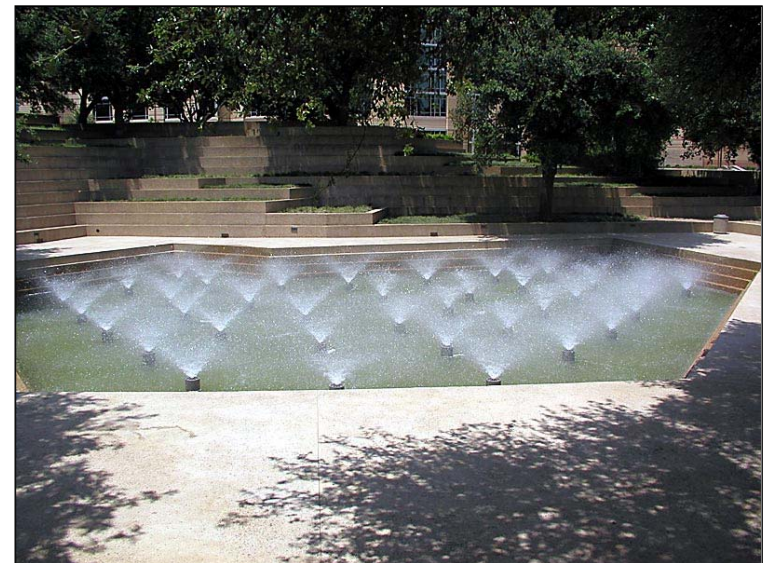
- Located where it is visible and easily accessible to potential users.
- Available for public use and inviting to all.
- Beautiful from both the outside and the inside.
- Secure and safe.

### **Storefront in Handley Historic District**



Historic Handley is one of several older districts that use storefront canopies and arcades to create an attractive streetscape for pedestrians and motorists. (Source: Planning Department, 1999.)

### **Fort Worth Water Gardens**



The Water Gardens is a treasured Downtown park that will enjoy more activity as a result of the Lancaster Corridor Redevelopment Project. (Source: Planning Department, 2004.)



- Accessible to children and disabled people.
- Engaging to users (e.g., through interactive sculpture and fountains).
- Designed to support special events or gatherings.
- Easily and economically maintained.

The most prevalent public spaces in Fort Worth are parks and plazas.

- **Parks:** A neighborhood or community park is often the heart of a community — its outdoor meeting place. A neighborhood park or square may be a place where people go to buy food, relax, talk to friends, play with children, or watch the activity going on around them. The design of these spaces has a profound influence on their use, safety, and utility, and, by extension, on the value of property in the neighborhood.
- **Plazas:** A plaza is a mostly hard-surfaced, outdoor public space. Its main function is to provide a place for sitting, eating, and public events. A public plaza usually includes various landscape elements, such as trees, flowers, fountains, sculptures, and public art. Pedestrian malls, or former streets converted for exclusive pedestrian use, are similar to plazas in design and function.

With the exception of a few plazas and urban parks in Downtown, Fort Worth has a shortage of urban public spaces. Recent amendments to the park dedication policy, discussed in detail in Chapter 6: Parks and Community Services, are intended to promote the development of urban parks and plazas.

### **Trinity River and Waterfront Spaces**

The Trinity River is one of Fort Worth's most distinctive features and is a focal point of cultural and recreational activities. The river has places to boat and fish, sites for picnics, miles of trails for walking, biking and horseback riding, spaces for civic events and performing arts, a botanic garden, natural settings, and peaceful hideaways. Some stretches of the river, however, are still underutilized. Accessibility is often poor in these locations, resulting from weak linkages between the river and adjacent neighborhoods or commercial districts.

The Trinity River Vision, also discussed in Chapter 6: Parks and Community Services, is an ambitious and farsighted master planning effort undertaken by the Tarrant Regional Water District, Streams and Valleys, Inc., and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, in cooperation with the City of Fort Worth. The plan contains recommendations to improve the river's accessibility to the public, preserve its natural beauty, attract more people to its banks, and increase its prominence within the city. Appropriate urban design strategies will be required to implement the plan's recommendations. In particular, the recommendation to create an urban waterfront at the northern edge of Downtown, as depicted in the concept plan to the right, would dramatically reshape Fort Worth's urban core. Appropriate design standards for this new waterfront area called Trinity Uptown, are being prepared to ensure that new development positively contributes to the public realm experience along the water.

### **Trinity Uptown Plan**



This concept plan depicts Trinity Uptown, the ambitious vision for a new urban waterfront along the Trinity River. The Trinity River Vision Master Plan includes other recommendations to enhance the river corridors so that they remain essential greenways for open space, trails, neighborhood focal points, wildlife, and special recreation areas. (Source: Gideon Toal, 2004.)

### **Gateways/Entryways**

The visual identity of Fort Worth is formed by a collection of images, most often seen from a moving vehicle. An opportunity exists to strengthen the image of Fort Worth by using the major vehicular entry points, including bridges, as gateways to the city. Today, the majority of these entry points lack any representation of their unique place. A gateway serves as the symbolic entry to a district and provides an introduction to what exists within the area. An effective gateway design establishes an immediate image or impression and is visually harmonious with the surroundings. These entry points need special treatment and visual enhancement to give those entering the city a positive experience. Improving the appearance and prominence of gateways can be accomplished through the symbolic use of urban design elements, including public art, landscaping, building corner treatments, special lighting, and signs.

Primary gateways into Fort Worth and into Downtown include entrance points from the city's highways and major streets.

### **Scenic Corridors**

Scenic corridors are areas that have been recognized as scenic, cultural, architectural, or historic assets. The Zoning Ordinance outlines the criteria for designation. A scenic corridor must include or reflect one or more of the following:

- Character of Fort Worth
- Architectural significance
- Historic event or person
- Character of neighborhood
- Designated historical area
- Views and vistas
- Gateways
- Connecting routes (e.g., connect scenic areas)
- Parks and natural features

Regulations in addition to base zoning standards apply to scenic corridor overlay districts. In 2002, the City Council adopted an amendment to the Zoning Ordinance to help minimize the visual impact of telecommunications towers citywide by encouraging the installation of stealth towers and co-location of new antennas on existing towers. Stealth towers are integrated with existing structures or designed so as not to be recognizable as telecommunications towers. The 2002 amendment also prohibits standard telecommunications towers in scenic or historic areas, but allows stealth telecommunications towers in these areas upon approval of the design by the Scenic Preservation and Design Review Commission.

Examples of existing scenic corridors include the following:

- North Main Street from the Stockyards to Downtown.
- Lancaster Avenue from Camp Bowie Boulevard to South Beach Street.
- I-35W from 28<sup>th</sup> Street exit south to the centerline of the Trinity River.
- I-30 from Downtown east to Loop 820 East.

### **North Main Street: Gateway to Downtown**



The historic Tarrant County Courthouse marks the entrance into Downtown for residents and visitors traveling south on North Main Street.

(Source: Planning Department, 2000)



- US 287 (Martin Luther King Freeway) from Downtown southeast to Village Creek Road.

### **Mixed-Use Growth Centers and Urban Villages**

Chapter 4: Land Use introduces the concept of mixed-use growth centers and urban villages. Nearly all of the urban design principles that have been identified in this chapter (e.g., pedestrian-oriented development, strategically located and well-designed public spaces and buildings, accessible open spaces, etc.) are essential elements for mixed-use growth centers and urban villages. These places have a concentration of jobs, housing, entertainment, public spaces, civic buildings, public transportation stops, and pedestrian activity. This variety of land uses within a walkable, human-scaled environment will create great urban places and will also help reduce automobile dependency. The character of these places will be heavily influenced by the urban design strategies used to guide their development.

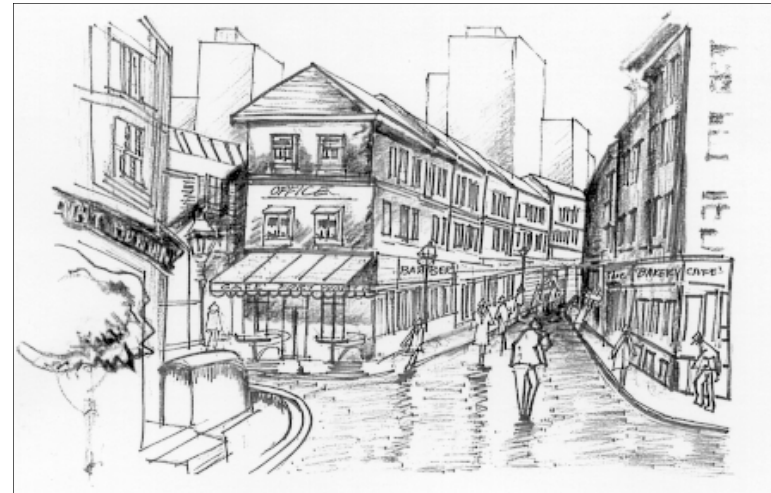
Developing growth centers and urban villages that provide housing, employment, and recreational options within walking distance of transit stations is one component of a strategy to improve regional air quality. (This strategy is more thoroughly discussed in Chapter 18: Environmental Quality.) The design and location of transportation facilities will influence the effectiveness of transit improvements. Mass transit hubs serving Fort Worth residents, as well as those living in surrounding areas, should connect to other areas of concentrated jobs, such as existing office parks and other mixed-use growth centers. Roads, transit, and bicycle routes should interconnect all growth centers. Within mixed-use growth centers, urban design strategies should be used to promote cycling and walking as alternatives to driving.

A legible, pedestrian-scaled street grid is critical to promoting walking and cycling. Such a network offers the possibility of various routes to destinations, and is often more efficient than contemporary cul-de-sac subdivisions. Growth center streets should be an inviting pedestrian environment enhanced by the streetscape amenities discussed earlier. A network of bicycle routes can provide another safe, non-polluting, transportation option within the growth centers.

Mixed-use growth centers should also include a diversity of housing types and densities. Buildings with different footprints, heights, and scales will generate housing options for households of varying size and income within the same neighborhood. The development of mixed-income communities is a goal of the City's housing policy, and urban design strategies can act together with the other initiatives listed in Chapter 5: Housing to achieve this goal.

Within mixed-use growth centers, the highest density developments should be located near the commercial core. Lower density developments, including single-family homes, should be located on the growth center's periphery. Within the higher-density core, building fronts should form consistent edges, outlining the street space and defining a public realm in which sidewalks and stoops contribute to social interaction and neighborhood safety.

## **Mixed-Use Development**



Compact development is encouraged in the mixed-use growth centers. An active, pedestrian-scaled public realm will characterize these urban environments. Residential and office spaces on the upper floors can support a variety of retail establishments at the street level. (Source: Planning Department, 1999.)



The mixed-use zoning ordinance encourages the adaptive reuse of older buildings. This mixed-use building on Magnolia Avenue contains a ground level restaurant and second-floor apartments. (Source: Planning Department, 2002.)

On March 20, 2001, the City Council adopted an ordinance establishing low intensity (MU-1) and high intensity (MU-2) mixed-use districts. Although the ordinance incorporates many of the urban design strategies discussed above, district-specific urban design guidelines or standards can help assure quality design in mixed-use growth centers and urban villages. On December 11, 2001, the City Council adopted an ordinance establishing the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines as an overlay zoning district.

## GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Use urban design strategies to establish an attractive, well-planned city that promotes pedestrian activity, encourages the full enjoyment of the city's public realm, enhances the community image, and attracts the private investment necessary to create vibrant growth centers, thriving entertainment districts, and safe neighborhoods. Meeting the specific urban design objectives of current and proposed projects will allow Fort Worth to approach this ambitious goal.

## POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

### Current Policy

- Promote mixed-use, pedestrian and transit-oriented development as described above and in Chapter 4: Land Use.

### Strategies

- Involve affected property owners, residents, and other interested parties in the development of urban design strategies.
- Use urban design as a tool to revitalize central city neighborhoods and commercial districts.
- Integrate policies aimed at improving environmental quality with innovative urban design strategies. An example of this integration is using pervious or semi-pervious surfaces that absorb stormwater within surface parking lots.
- Locate telecommunications facilities in a manner that is compatible with adjacent and nearby uses. When feasible, require the placement of antennas on existing structures.

## PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS

Programs and projects that will help to achieve the urban design goals and objectives are listed below.

### Safe Pathways Program

To address the need for better pedestrian access, the City implemented the Safe Pathways Program in 1998, which provides funding for the construction of new sidewalks and replacement of deteriorated sidewalks in older districts. Prioritization of sidewalk projects is based on need and pedestrian demand. Replacement sidewalks are funded 75 percent by the City and 25 percent by the adjacent property owner. Since the implementation of the Safe Pathways Program, approximately 144,240

## Urban Village Development Projects



The urban village development program has been successful in encouraging desirable mixed-use development. Exciting new projects are underway in the Mercado (top) and West Seventh Village (bottom), among others. (Source: Planning Department, 2005.)



linear feet of sidewalks have been installed, mostly in the central city.

### **Lancaster Corridor Redevelopment Project**

- Long-term urban design vision: Prepare a comprehensive urban design plan for the Lancaster corridor, an area bounded on the north by 9<sup>th</sup> Street, on the south by Vickery, on the west by Henderson, and on the east by I-35W, to transform the southern part of Downtown into a great urban space with a lively mix of pedestrian-oriented activities within the next few years.

The major initiatives of the Lancaster Corridor Redevelopment Project include:

- Redesign of Lancaster Avenue: Design and construct a new pedestrian-oriented street from I-35W to Henderson.
- Hemphill/Lamar/Taylor connector: Design and construct a street extension connecting Lamar and Taylor on the north side of I-30 with Hemphill on the south side.
- Convention Center Expansion: Determine funding sources and timing of Phase III of the Convention Center expansion.
- Water Gardens: Implement improvements to the park's southern section and improve the overall safety and security in the park.
- Fort Worth Plaza Hotel: Assist the private sector in renovation and expansion of Fort Worth Plaza.
- Convention Center Hotel: Facilitate development of a headquarters hotel near the Convention Center in partnership with the Omni Hotels development group. Convention Center Hotel is scheduled to be completed in the spring of 2008.
- Hyde Park and Ninth Street: Continue working with the T, the U.S. General Services Administration, and Downtown Fort Worth, Inc. to design and construct a transit plaza on the former site of Fort Worth's first public library and streetscape improvements for the Ninth Street corridor between the ITC and Hyde Park.
- Acquisition of Surplus Property: Determine process for acquiring excess right-of-way from TxDOT to convey to qualified developers for redevelopment.
- TCC Relocation/Expansion: Facilitate relocation of Tarrant County College (TCC) to a new expanded campus at Trinity Uptown.
- T&P Terminal Project: Assist the private sector in renovation of upper floors of the T&P Terminal Building and construction of an apartment building to the east.
- T&P Warehouse Project: Work with the private partner to advance the adaptive reuse of the T&P Warehouse as apartments and street level retail.
- Municipal Parking Garage: Work with private partners to develop a multi-user parking garage.

### **North Main Street Corridor Project**

- Long-term urban design vision: Implement changes according to the urban design plan for North Main Street from the Tarrant County Courthouse to the Historic Stockyards. Increase tourism and stimulate economic development throughout the North Main corridor by creating an attractive, pedestrian-oriented

### **Redesign of Lancaster Avenue**



Lancaster Avenue will be substantially narrowed from its current width of 180-250 feet, and it will be redesigned so as to emphasize pedestrian activity and the use of public transportation. The City will convey the excess right-of-way to qualified developers for redevelopment in accordance with prescribed guidelines.

(Source: Cliff Garten Studio, 2006.)

### **Hyde Park Transit Plaza**



The City of Fort Worth, the U.S. General Services Administration, the Fort Worth Transportation Authority, and Downtown Fort Worth, Inc. are working collaboratively to design and construct a transit plaza at Hyde Park, the historic site of a 19th century public square. The proposed Hyde Park transit plaza would integrate existing public spaces such as Hyde Park and Lanham Plaza, and would reintroduce a public space onto a site that has historically been used for public purposes. (Source: Planning Department, 2004.)



environment and enhance the distinct character of each of the corridor's three districts: the riverfront/industrial area between the Courthouse and the railroad – Paddock Bend; the retail and restaurant district – centered on the Mercado between the railroad and 23<sup>rd</sup> Street; and the Stockyards district between 23<sup>rd</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> Streets.

- Pilot projects: Implement two selected pilot projects:
  - Northside Drive to 20th Street - Mercado Area
  - 25th Street to 27th Street - Stockyards Gateway

#### **Berry Street Corridor Project**

- Long-term urban design vision: Implement changes according to the urban design plan for Berry Street from Evans Avenue to University Drive. Stimulate new economic development throughout the corridor with urban design and other development strategies and successfully integrate pedestrian-oriented uses along Berry Street without disrupting adjacent neighborhoods and historic resources.
- Priority projects: Implement improvements designed for the following four segments of the corridor:
  - Waits Avenue to Forest Park Boulevard - University District
  - College Avenue to Travis Avenue - Residential District
  - Jennings Avenue to Grove Street - Parks District
  - Grove Street to Evans Avenue - Gateway District

#### **Wayfinding Project**

- Long-term urban design vision: Implement changes according to forthcoming coordinated signage and information system that would direct visitors to destinations in Downtown, the Cultural District, and the Historic Stockyards.
- The project has two components:
  - Design and implement a signage system to direct vehicular and pedestrian traffic within the three visitor districts. This signage system will provide information about attractions, parking facilities, and transit.
  - Maintain an interactive website with information about parking, transit, and points of interest in Downtown, the Cultural District, and the Historic Stockyards.

#### **Other Projects**

- Evans & Rosedale: Implement changes according to the urban design plan for Evans Avenue to transform this historic area into an attractive and vibrant business and cultural district. Design and construct public facilities that include a new public health building and branch library.
- Urban Villages: Implement urban design strategies for the mixed-use urban villages along seven priority corridors — West 7th Street, Camp Bowie Boulevard, Hemphill Street, East Lancaster Avenue, Berry Street, North Main Street, and East Rosedale Street.

#### **North Main Street Corridor**



Streetscape improvements will enhance the connection between Downtown and the Historic Stockyards. (Source: Planning Department, 2005.)

#### **The Plaza at Evans & Rosedale Village**



Evans & Rosedale, an urban village along the East Rosedale commercial corridor, will soon become a vibrant business and cultural district centered around this public plaza. (Sources: Huitt-Zollars, Inc., Planning Department, 2004.)

### **Capital Improvement Projects**

Urban design projects were included in the 1998 and 2004 capital improvement bond program. Capital improvement projects that have been identified are listed in Appendix D with the estimated costs, completion dates, and potential funding sources. Seven projects are identified, totaling nearly \$35 million, \$2.8 million of which is not funded.